

COCHITUATE RAIL TRAIL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING
April 7, 2016

Name	Affiliation	Present	Absent
Josh Ostroff	Board of Selectmen (chair)	X	
Jamie Errickson	Community & Economic Development Director		X
Dick Cugini	Recreation & Parks Commission	X	
John Magee	Bicycle and Pedestrian	X	
William Schoenig	Member at Large	X	
David Camacho	Member at Large (vice chair)		X
Eric Jones	Member at Large	X	
Peter Henry	Member at Large	X	
Jan Henderson	Member at Large (clerk)	X	

Also present was Jon Marshall, Director of Natick Recreation and Parks, and Chief of Police James Hicks. The meeting was called to order at 6:37 P.M. in the School Department Training Room in Town Hall.

1. Introductions - Participants introduced themselves.

2. Discussion with Director of Natick Recreation & Parks

The last CRTAC meeting, a public information session on March 21, was attended by a number of abutters. Questions were raised about maintenance and the need for a maintenance plan. Jon Marshall, Director of Recreation and Parks, reached out to his counterparts in other towns about their trails to learn more about which entity has oversight and takes care of day-to-day maintenance. It is important to have a plan in place to define what the Town's responsibilities are and what role Friends groups will play to keep it in good condition. Personally, he would prefer a mixture of stewardship. In Plymouth there wasn't an ownership plan, so Parks oversees it, but the funding is not tied in so it's a lower priority.

In Milford they have the funding and staff to care for the trail and say it's 'the greatest thing ever.' It is still relatively new. Universal signage is important to do as a Town with consistent themes. It is 5.5 miles and costs \$20,000 in maintenance annually (\$11K for supplies such as mulch and edging, and \$9K for labor). It cost \$5K per year initially when it was newer.

Over the years the Natick Recreation and Parks Department has been responsible for parks, fields and school grounds with the Conservation Commission's Trails Maintenance Committee overseeing trails. Things have been evolving, and trails are becoming major connectors within the town. The CRT is really a linear park as well as a transportation corridor. These trails all need to come together in the Town Master Plan.

In response to questions, J. Marshall said that the other trails are open dawn until dusk. If they are unpaved then they are not treated in the winter. Framingham does some plowing in the winter, and Holliston keeps some parts open. It may be helpful to attend the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission (MAPC) regional trails conference where different models are discussed. It was also recommended that committee members go see the Upper Charles Trail in Holliston/Milford, which has done an amazing job with volunteered maintenance. It would be helpful to ask them about the numbers of volunteers needed to ensure proper maintenance. The Natick Runners Club said they would be happy to help with stewardship. It would be good to introduce them to the Friends of Natick Trails.

3. Public Safety Planning for the Proposed Cochituate Rail Trail

J. Ostroff explained that at the last meeting there was a perception by some abutting neighbors that a rail trail could bring vandalism, crime and drinking. His understanding from other trails is that this is unusual, but given that we could anticipate up to 1,000 people per day (like Arlington), we need to be prepared and have a safety plan in place. Over the coming months it would be good to create some guidelines, however the CRTAC is only advisory and it is not yet clear who will have authority for the trail once it is opened.

Chief Hicks agreed and said that he contacted Chiefs from other towns with trails to learn from their experience. Milford, Holliston, Arlington and Lexington have not had any major problems on their trails. Some of them created special by-laws for the paths. Framingham may use motorcycles to patrol their side. Chief Hicks used to work in Bedford where they have the Minuteman Trail. He said there were concerns before the trail opened related to break-ins, vandalism, assaults, medicals and unscrupulous behavior. These are legitimate concerns, but they were really more of a perception than a problem. It is helpful to look at historically similar environments. In his nine years in Bedford the main issue was who had the right-of-way, rollerblades vs. bikes. There were lots of houses along the Minuteman; some put up fences and some kept their property open. There was not a single instance of a home being broken into. The Farm Lake Path was in a very rural area and nothing happened there either. He can't say this won't happen, but historically he has not seen it to be an issue. In Holliston, the biggest complaint they receive is related to dog waste.

When asked if a built path was better than an abandoned corridor, he said yes. People find it comforting where there is activity and a safe atmosphere. More usage results in crime prevention with more eyes on the street. D. Cugini gave a couple of examples of that at Camp Arrowhead Path and the area under the Cochituate Street bridge. Chief Hicks said people generally respect the dawn to dusk rules, but residents need to be the eyes and ears, and call if they are worried. In planning the trail, we do need to ensure there is adequate access in case of safety or medical situations. When asked about the dumping of rubbish, appliance and construction waste he said he was confident that we would see an improvement in the dumping problem when there is a trail instead of an abandoned rail bed.

There was some discussion about blue security phones and whether other trails have them. These ring to a monitoring company, not the police. Most people have cell phones now. There will be mile markers which may help people describe where they are.

According to J. Ostroff, Fire Chief White said they will not patrol it, but that the whole trail has to be accessible by ambulance. Currently the plan is not to use bollards, but rather a high curb/planting to keep vehicles off of the trail. Emergency vehicles, with higher wheel bases, can drive over them.

J. Ostroff handed out one page of Safety Planning Recommendations for the group and Chief Hicks to consider (attached). He suggested it would be helpful to compare ourselves to other towns with similar demographics, density of housing, and types and rates of crime. It could also be helpful to learn from them if they have any statistics related to conditions before and after their trails were installed. It could be helpful to have a safety meeting related to the trail in the next three months and discuss safety recommendations. If questions come up at Town Meeting it would be helpful for people to hear what the Chief has to say.

There was some discussion about lighting and the need to decide if it will be lit. We will ask BETA to think about what would be involved. Lighting of the bridges and intersections make sense, and possibly a light near the Am Vet driveway crossing. There is one section of the Minuteman with lights near Alewife station where there are a lot of commuters after dusk.

The issue of betterments and the possible increase in abutter's taxes was raised. J. Ostroff will give the Assessor a heads-up that questions have been raised by abutters and could come up at future meetings.

Related to fencing, MassDOT will not reimburse us for privacy fencing unless it is required in the design for safety, although the Town could appropriate funds for abutters who want them. Certain public accommodations need them; where there are safety reasons we will install them (e.g. Camp Arrowhead, Lake Cochituate), but it is not common practice to install them along rail trails. Most of this trail is sunken or edged with a berm, which is to our advantage.

4. Project Updates

- a. Design** – MassDOT now has the revised 25% plans showing the trail terminus at Willow Street. BETA will send final revisions by April 28th. At that point we will be closer to 75% complete in design. The utility meeting can't happen until we have the state's Route 9 topo survey completed. J. Ostroff will nudge our Project Manager to let her know we need this for the revised submission.

- b. Acquisition**

- i. Town Meeting** – The Finance Committee voted favorable action for initial approval of \$2.5M to acquire the Saxonville Branch (Special Town Meeting Article 3) and deferred a recommendation on the Wonderbread Spur (Article 2), pending a public hearing on the environmental results and information on any outstanding law suits still open related to the CSX property. Spring Town Meeting begins on Tuesday, April 12, 2016. Depending on spring Town Meeting's initial approval, there will be an environmental and legal public hearing, followed by another Town Meeting vote for final approval.

Two Fincom members voted against it. One thought that these funds should be spent on Senior Housing (however the Stabilization Fund can't be used for that, just for open space acquisition). Another member thought the funds should be used to acquire property near the Charles River (in south Natick, when the mitigation funds are generally intended to offset increased density in northwest Natick).

The Wonderbread Spur Article may need to be postponed as the ownership is not clear and the Selectmen are discussing this under executive session.

- ii. **Metes and Bounds Survey** – This work is being completed now. Normally one would expect the seller to do this, but in this case CSX expects the Town to do it.
 - iii. **Environmental** – The Finance Committee raised concerns that any contamination found are the buyer's problem, per the liability and indemnity provisions in the agreement with CSX. FinCom encouraged the Town to go beyond the minimum testing of arsenic and other things expected in a rail bed, to include PCBs, and to also include areas beyond the rail bed where there is human activity (e.g., near Mechanic Street and Navy Yard Field). Per the 2008 results by StanTec, given that the rail bed would be capped, 'elevated levels are not reportable' so there was no need for a clean-up plan. More testing will be done this time. There was some discussion about any need for monitoring wells near sensitive area and where there are existing wells to ensure we know of any issue areas. G. Lewis will ask StanTec to describe the testing process and to show us on a map where the testing is taking place.
 - iv. **Legal** – The Town Meeting presentation will address the issue of eminent domain and rail banking (which freezes issues of title and claims to preserve corridors). We could hold a follow-up public hearing on legal issues if the public raises concerns.
- c. **Construction** – MassDOT's draft Capital Investment Plan (CIP) comes out next week. We may have a better idea of how much the State is willing to fund construction at that point.
- 5. **Friends of Natick Trails Update** – The group will be filing for a 501(c)3 soon. They are discussing naming rights and funding amounts for things like bricks, plaques and possibly the bridges. Legally we may need legislation for naming of the Route 9 or Route 30 bridges, but it could be done. These funds could be for a defined period of time and be used for maintenance or scholarships or other things.
 - 6. **Trail videos** – The drone view footage is on the Town's CRT website now. Thank you W. Schoenig for creating it.

7. **Meeting minutes:** February 24 minutes - a motion to approve by W. Schoening, seconded by P. Henry was approved with two abstentions (E. Jones, D. Cugini). March 21, 2016 – a motion to approve by E. Jones, seconded by W. Schoening was approved and unanimously voted.
8. **Earth Day, May 1, 2016** – Reminder to those who volunteered to help J. Ostroff out on that day. Please stop by the tent and help out if you can. J. Ostroff may update the newsletter for this event.
9. **New Business** – John Magee is moving to Mendon and as such will no longer be serving as the Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee liaison to this committee, however he does intend to continue to participate via the Friends of Natick Trails. The group voted on a resolution to express appreciation to John Magee for his years of service to the Town of Natick and for his time on the CRTAC in particular. The resolution passed unanimously.

It was recommended that a letter be sent to the CRT abutters soon after Town Meeting to update them on the status of the project, the State's CIP, any safety or maintenance meetings or updates, and hopefully a 25% public hearing date. There was a motion to approve this by D. Cugini, seconded by P. Henry. The motion was approved unanimously.

10. **Future meeting schedule** – We may hold the next meeting in early May, possibly a joint meeting with Parks and Recreation. Please remember the Framingham ribbon cutting will be on May 14th.

On a motion by D. Cugini, seconded by J. Magee, the committee voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:57 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Jan Henderson

Cochituate Rail Trail – Safety Planning Recommendations

For Discussion

April 7, 2016

- The Town will draw on the experience of other communities in developing and revising a safety plan
- Trail safety will be coordinated with abutters, including town and state agencies, residents and commercial property owners and tenants
- The CRT will be designed and constructed to allow emergency vehicle access
- Safety planning should be coordinated with Framingham
- Safety planning should be undertaken for all trails
- The CRT will receive regular patrols by motorcycle, bicycle and on-foot officers as determined by the Chief
- Non-motorized vehicles will be prohibited (excepting public safety and motorized wheelchairs), as defined under Massachusetts General Law.
 - A recommendation on electric bicycles, Segways, hoverboards and similar devices is pending if these devices are not regulated at the state level
- Residents and trail users will be encouraged to call police to report any concerns
 - Trail neighbors will be provided designated points of contact to communicate concerns and get quick answers to questions
- Subject to rules and regulations, CRT usage should be limited to daylight hours (with exceptions for commuters)
- Use of alcohol, tobacco and any controlled substance are prohibited consistent with Town bylaws and regulations
 - To discourage collisions and accidents, the opening of the trail will include intensive education about safe usage
 - Trail signage will encourage respectful behavior towards trail neighbors
- Litter will be picked up and the trail maintained on a regular basis; a maintenance agreement will be pursued with a friends group
- Fences and gates will be used to discourage trail users from restricted or unsafe areas
- The safety plans and regulations will be communicated through a variety of channels as the trail approaches public use; trail regulations will be posted
- Regulations will be developed regarding pets